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Quarterly E-News Update

Dear Constituent,

This is the first in a series of Quarterly E-News Updates that will be sent in addition to e-newsletters on particular topics. The purpose of this Quarterly E-News Update is to give the highlights of the high and low points of the first three months of the 109 th Congress.

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Rep. John Lewis Secures \$16 Million to Ease Atlanta Traffic and Pollution

Over \$16 million in federal transportation funding has been allocated to the 5 th District in legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives. This funding will:

- Ease traffic congestion and provide infrastructure improvements to Memorial Drive, Northside Drive, the I-75/Windy Hill Road interchange, and the Buckhead corridor;
- Support MARTA's efforts to acquire clean fuel buses; and
- Help Cobb County implement its Smart Technology programs and Facilities Improvement initiatives.

This funding will also support an Alternative Analysis and Preliminary Engineering Study for the proposed **Atlanta Beltline/C-Loop public transit project**. The 22-mile beltway would encircle Atlanta approximately one to three miles outside of the downtown area. It will also provide easier access to many of Atlanta's cultural institutions and other area attractions allowing citizens to avoid downtown or major highways. The new transit line will be adjacent to more than 2900 acres of underutilized property suitable for residential, mixed-use housing, and transit oriented development as well as new parks, greenspace, and biking or walking trails.

All of these funds were appropriated through **H.R. 3, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA-LU)**, which was passed this year by the U.S. House of Representatives. The legislation still has to be considered by the Senate before becoming law, but it is expected to pass without a problem. H.R. 3 provides a total of \$284 billion nationwide in federal highway, transit, and road safety projects through 2009. It is a \$4.5 billion increase over last year's appropriation passed by the House.

Rep. John Lewis Convenes Social Security Town Hall Meetings

In response to the President's plan to partially privatize Social Security, I hosted two town hall meetings to allow constituents to hear from the experts and to clarify misinformation that has run throughout the public

debate about the Social Security program.



Congressman John Lewis meets constituents at a Town Hall Meeting to hear concerns about Social Security.

First and foremost, people should understand that Social Security is not in crisis. Today, it operates exactly as it should and is widely applauded as the most successful government program implemented in the last 70 years. There are some problems we face down the road, but they can be fixed without destroying this critical safety net that keeps the elderly, the disabled, and orphaned children from falling into poverty.

Social Security is a sacred trust, an agreement made between the American government and the American people. It is not a government hand-out, it is a program citizens pay into with each paycheck that offers them limited retirement benefits when they are seniors or become disabled. We cannot afford to gamble away this guaranteed benefit in risky privatization programs. Social Security must be available for all of us, for our children and our grandchildren, and those unborn generations for years to come.

During the town halls, we gathered a distinguished group of non-partisan experts to give the facts about Social Security's current programs and to discuss the limited challenges the future will hold. These experts came from organizations like:

- the Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons (AARP),
- National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare,
- Rock the Vote,
- the Concord Coalition,
- the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and
- the New America Foundation.

The first Town Hall was held at the Loudermilk Center in downtown Atlanta on February 26, 2005, and the second was held at the Manley Center of Spelman College on March 30, 2005.

Social Security has been good for our mothers, for our fathers, our grandparents and for the disabled. Families, children, and senior citizens rely on its guaranteed support to keep them from falling into poverty. I believe we cannot afford to gamble away the sure support of Social Security to participate in risky partial privatization programs. I will do all I can to continue to find fiscally sound, responsible ways to stabilize the future and longevity of the Social Security safety net. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and concerns as this debate continues. For more facts on Social Security:

- Please visit the Ways and Means House Democrats web page for more information and many useful documents
http://www.house.gov/waysandmeans_democrats/issues/social_security.shtml
- For information on how the Administration's plans would impact African Americans, please link to <http://democrats.senate.gov/dpc/>. Key Search word: "Social Security."
- Also, visit the Democratic Leader's web page to calculate how much you could loose under the leading Social Security proposals, and other information.
Go to <http://democricleader.house.gov/> for information on social security.

The Deep Cuts in the 2006 Budget Jeopardize Your Way of Life

Even though I, along with other Democrats, fought the 2006 Budget, Congress passed a fiscally and morally

irresponsible plan. Many objections were raised to it, as reflected by the slim margin of victory in the 218 to 214 House of Representatives vote. Nevertheless over 150 programs that affect the quality of life of millions of Americans—seniors, pre-school children, the disabled, teachers, college students, and many more—were cut. While some public officials are shaking our hands and speaking the language of shared values, they are picking our pockets of the many hard-won rights that have brought greater freedom to citizens across America. If this budget were fully implemented, it would drastically alter the way most Americans live. Most of us do not realize how much we depend upon federal programs to help us live more comfortably. We need to fight back before it's too late.

Education, the cornerstone of democracy and economic freedom, was the hardest hit in this budget .

Education programs were seen as expendable by this Administration, regardless of commitments made or implied by the No Child Left Behind initiative. Numerous programs that middle class families across America depend upon will be terminated or crippled by the 2.5 billion deep cuts. College student loan programs, vocational programs, gifted and talented programs, pre-school education programs, teacher enrichment programs, after-school programs and many more will no longer enable the educational advancement of millions of middle class Americans. Public schools will be left principally unsupported by federal funding to help them educate America's children.

For more information on education cuts, please visit the Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi's web page: <http://democraticleader.house.gov/> and scroll down to the bottom of the center column and click on the word "more" under the heading "Education."

Medicaid will be cut by \$20 billion delivering a devastating blow to almost 60 million children, elderly and people with disabilities who rely on the program. Though attempts have been made to manufacture a Social Security crisis, the real urgency is in the Medicaid program that has been targeted for large cuts, leaving many American citizens in need of medical support. Without this program, these citizens will have to rely more and more on family members to see them through their crises, requiring us to splinter dwindling family income in more directions.

For more information on Medicaid cuts, please visit the Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's web page: <http://democraticleader.house.gov/> and scroll down to the bottom of the center column and click on the word "more" under the heading "Health Care."

Critical health care programs will be frozen or terminated, including programs at the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant program, and HIV/AIDS prevention and research programs. These agencies provide hope to patients who are seeking last resort solutions to terminal and urgent medical conditions. They also study critical diseases like cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, birth defects, and HIV to help advance cures for debilitating illnesses. Every American is affected directly or indirectly by these diseases. They are major killers in this country. This vital research, managed by government agencies without a profit-motive in mind, helps bring us closer to a cure for these devastating illnesses.

Unbelievably, the budget cuts funding for veterans healthcare, disability programs, and death benefits for the families of servicemen killed in action. Even though the Republican leadership, including the President, has spoken passionately about their support for our troops, the budget the President delivered and that was passed by Congress does not reflect those values. Veterans groups across the country have denounced the inhumanity of these budget cuts.

For more information, and a report entitled "Veterans Health Care Funding During the Bush Administration" go to the House Veterans Affairs Committee minority website at <http://veterans.house.gov/democratic/budget/3-14-05budget.htm>

In contrast, this budget continues to offer tax breaks for America's wealthiest citizens and corporations and increases the military budget. Furthermore, if implemented, it would add \$2 trillion to our national debt over the next five years. The cost of the national debt today is already about \$25,000 per person in America. An additional \$2 trillion would increase that burden on the average taxpayer. Many members of both parties have criticized the Administration's disregard for the national debt as fiscally

irresponsible and an immoral burden to hand to our children and grandchildren.

For more information on the impact of tax breaks for the wealthy and huge deficits:

http://www.house.gov/budget_democrats/2005_docs.htm

I did support an **alternative budget resolution** that balanced our commitment to **education, veterans health care, and Medicaid, while continuing to strengthen our communities and protect our environment**. Without massive tax cuts for the rich and increases in defense spending, all of these priorities could be managed in a fiscally responsible way. This alternative was voted down strictly along party lines.

For more information on the responsible Democratic alternative budget:

http://www.house.gov/budget_democrats/2005_docs.htm

Without the counterbalance of the minority, the wide margin of the Republican majority enables passage of any legislation they desire without regard to reasonable objections from other parties. I will continue to stand up for the needs of our District. This is an important issue and I value your input. Please let our Senators know how you feel.

For an in-depth analysis of the budget resolutions, please go to the House Budget Committee minority:

http://www.house.gov/budget_democrats/2005_docs.htm

LEGISLATION ON THE HORIZON:

Reauthorization of the Special Provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

In Florida in 2000, voters were confused by their ballots, polling equipment broke down, and polls did not open as scheduled.

In Ohio in 2004, many people stood in what appeared to be unmovable lines for eight and nine hours trying to exercise their right to vote. There were an inadequate number of voting machines and in some instances, bogus officials were sent to polling stations and were found disseminating misinformation and questioning the choices of voters.

For more detailed information, please see "Preserving Democracy: What went wrong in Ohio" Status Report of the House Judiciary Committee Democratic Staff

http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/ohiostatusrept1505.pdf and

http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/issues/issues/election.html for other related documents

As a result of these problems, many Americans were denied the right to vote. The vote is the most powerful, nonviolent tool that our citizens have in a democratic society, and nothing but nothing should discourage, hamper or interfere with the right of every citizen to cast a vote for the person of their choice.

March 7, 2005, marks the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, the most productive legislation passed during the Civil Rights era. Historically, the Voting Rights Act removed barriers that systematically denied African Americans from participating in the democratic process. Today the Voting Rights Act protects us all offering the only legislative remedy we have to address the problems of the 2000 and 2004 election. Without the Voting Rights Act, it would be harder to verify the results of elections and to scrutinize changes to voting districts to make sure that they are fair. Until we can be completely certain that no election tampering exists in America, the Voting Rights Act is a necessary protection in our democracy.

Although the Act is a democratic imperative, some people are saying that African Americans will lose their right to vote if it is not reauthorized or that the whole Act will expire in 2007. The truth is that the 15 th Amendment to the Constitution protects the right of African Americans and all citizens to vote free of discrimination based on race or color and the Voting Rights Act itself does not expire.

However, there are special provisions of the Voting Rights Act that will expire if they are not renewed by Congress in 2007. They are:

- Section 5: The federal pre-clearance provisions. This section requires that voting changes to electoral districts and other aspects of the electoral process be reviewed by a federal judge to make sure that those changes are not discriminatory before they are made law;
- Section 4: The coverage provision. This Section determines which states and jurisdictions must seek the pre-clearance as described in Section 5. The states and jurisdictions covered have some of the most persistent histories of discrimination, including Georgia. Here the reauthorization process is beneficial because it allows Congress to review voting practices in the nation and to determine whether new states, like Ohio, should be included in this oversight. Also states proven to have resolved their discrimination problems have the opportunity to be taken off the list.
- Section(s) 6-9: The Federal Examiner/Observer provisions. Allows for election monitoring by the Department of Justice. This was the section that enabled monitors to witness election practices in Florida and other states in 2004 to ensure that fair and lawful procedures were used in places where questions were raised in recent elections.
- Section 203: The bilingual voting materials provisions. Mandates translation of voting materials for language minorities in certain jurisdictions. This enables new citizens to exercise their right to vote in the most informed way possible.

The history of the right to vote in America is a history of conflict, of struggling for the principle of one person, one vote. Many people died trying to protect that right. I was beaten, and jailed because I stood up for it. For millions like me, the struggle for the right to vote is not mere history; it is experience. The experience of the last two presidential elections tells us that the struggle is not over and that the special provisions of the Voting Rights Act are still necessary. We should not take a step backward, when there is still much to be done to ensure every vote and every voter counts. I will be leading the fight to reauthorize these vital provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Lewis". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Congressman John Lewis
Georgia's 5th Congressional District

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